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Weekly Situation Report

3 May 1978

on International Terrorism

ARTICLES

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Breakthrough in the Letelier Case

Recent developments regarding the 21 September 1976 bombing deaths of Orlando Letelier and a colleague in downtown Washington, D.C., have linked together an American Citizen who lived in Chile for twenty years, two Cuban exiles living in the U.S., working members of the Chilean intelligence service (formerly named DINA), and the former chief of the Chilean intelligence service.

In the aftermath of the bombing, U.S. officials traced leads to the Chilean intelligence service and discovered two photos of unidentified men who were believed to have traveled to the U.S. about one month before the bombing to arrange the operation with Cuban exiles. The photos were published in U.S. and Chilean newspapers, and within a short time, the two men were identified as a U.S. citizen who has lived in Chile for twenty years and a Chilean citizen who worked for DINA. In an attempt to convince the Chilean government to produce the two suspects for questioning the U.S. began the formal process of presenting "letters rogatory" to the Chilean courts; at first the Chilean government denied the existence of the two, but later, after increasing international criticism for its lack of cooperation in the case, the Chilean government admitted their existence and questioned them. In a surprise move, the American was arrested and placed on board a U.S.-bound airliner in the custody of FBI officials; Chilean authorities claimed that they had complied with the spirit and letter of the "letters rogatory" after having discovered the involvement of the American in the case.

As of early May, the American was in custody in the U.S., charged with conspiracy to commit murder and with bail set at five million dollars. Initial reports have revealed that he has agreed to cooperate completely with the authorities and has already incriminated at least ten other persons in the assassination. Authorities have stated that he has also provided information on several other bombing attacks on former Chilean officials in Latin America.

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Concurrent with the investigation of leads to Chile and DINA, U.S. officials discovered that two Cuban exiles living in the U.S. were connected to the assassination. During late April the two were arrested; at the time, one was found to be carrying cocaine and guns. Abroad, links to the case extended to the former chief of DINA, who was replaced shortly after his connection to the bombing became public. Another Chilean official, who had issued two false passports used by the American and the Chilean to enter the U.S. to arrange for the killing, has been officially reported to have committed suicide, although relatives claim he was assassinated by the Chilean government in order to prevent him from giving damaging information to investigating officials. As of May 1978, the investigation was continuing. (UNCLASSIFIED)

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